HALLMARKS

Spring 1997

Rings

I.

I found it in the keep-sake box Mom gave me when I left home. The gold baby ring seems to fill the room with the smell of milk, the sound of my mother singing "Amazing Grace," and the softness of the blanket that I had as a baby. It is nice to feel that safe again. I try to push it onto my hand, but I cannot make it fit.

II.

The ring was in the chest. with my diploma and junior prom corsage. It has my high school emblem on it. My initials are in cursive on the back. I think of putting on lipstick in the bathroom at football games, of the crazy parties, and the cute boys that took up my thoughts. I saved the last turn of my ring for my crush, he kissed my cheek. I washed around that spot for a month. I wish for the freedom that I had then. I try to put my ring on, but I cannot make it fit.

III.

It was in the shoe box with our marriage license and the house keys. I always wore it with the diamond ring, it looks alone without it.

I turn it over,

"Forever" is written on the back. That was before the velling. Before the plate shattering and the separate rooms. It was before the lawyers and "The Blonde." I think of going to Lamaze classes alone, of showing our child her father in pictures, and of waking up at night and finding no one there. I try to slip the band on,

but I cannot make it fit.



ERIN McAnally (10)

Guardian Angel

The bright beam of light projected to the images of what was once there onto the dusty white sheet that hung billowing weakly from the cracked storm window in her basement. The hieroglyphs, ancient relics, were visions of her running through what seemed to be a backyard, but nothing, not even the boy who held her hand so tightly was known to her. Even so, the girl gazed at the living past in a determined but vain attempt to grasp the face of the John Doe before her. She tried, struggling for a breath of air in a tormenting ocean of possibilities, but the five-year-old, dark haired, freckled face boy was no piece of the puzzle that had become her being.

She was not aware of the many times on those hot summer afternoons when he had picked her up with a twinkle in his eyes after she had fallen from her imaginary throne and scraped her knee. Nor did she remember all the Fourth of July celebrations where he had shared his sparklers with her and once had even spelled out "I love you" in the grass with fireworks. His gentle touch to wipe her tears, and his warming laughter that had always made her spit her milk out at dinner were erased from her memory as if they had never even inhabited her soul. He was gone from her sight and from her mind...forever.

The filmstrip finished rolling its hidden narrative, and the girl ran up the stairs to call the boy that had taken over her heart. She wondered what party she would go to that night, but for some reason that was unknown even to her, she could not find the strength to escape from the whirlwind that was her thoughts. Perhaps deep inside she longed to look up from her childish antics in the sandbox on those hot summer afternoons, and see him looking back at her with that same twinkle in his eye as he had so many times before.

A Conversation with my Grandmother

When I was a playground-perplexed child
With aspirations of finger-painting technicolor dreams,
I was whispered away with a faithful smile...
So mild...

As my grandmother sang indecent lullabys of brilliant means.

"Yes, dear, you have your father's laughing eyes,"
She would sing while stroking my hair with angels' breath.
Then exhaling all possibilities of me while the hummingbirds zipped by,
She would pour into me all her knowledge and innocence kept.

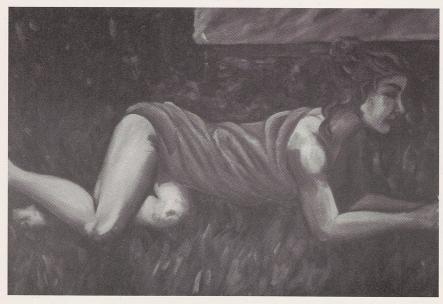
With pink-ribbon theories and violin-string frowns I'd crawl into her hibernation of fantasies forsaken

And for me she'd tell stories of forgotten purple dragons safe and sound

Upon hopscotch-memories that from me cannot be taken.

So grandmother, sing me to sleep
While the insomniac dew upon the grass heaves.
Sing me to sleep with the restlessness of the tempest-leaves
Sing me to sleep with cloudbursts and storm clouds rolling by
Grandmother, let me love you and believe in your lullabys.

Lisa Binkley (11)



REAGAN BAYDOUN (12)

Adolescent Butterfly

"Once again I have left a woman to her empty bed."

Not so empty, beloved —

Your memory lies with me all night in my dreams.

Again I can sleep with my head on your soft chest

And feel, as before, your arms gentle around my shoulders I sleep, cradled; I am enveloped by your remembered warmth.

Do not stay long away; though I may rest without you, I burn and ache For more than your dream - heart lying tender at my back.

Elizabeth McClellan (11)

Father

where were you when the roof leaked? water seeped inside. drops of your absence puddled on the floorboards. but you wouldn't lend us an umbrella. we know what you meant, we can hear you saying: "well, life's not fair, is it" in your strained defensive voice. a sponge devoured the deceit. we breathe you in this house – a lingering scent of secret mold, hidden rot, the wicked perfume of decay. i punished the floor beneath the cracks, scrubbing blisters into my palms. i wanted to smoke, to fill my lungs with mephitic cancer. i set out to catch colds, it was an art of personal infection. i could force you back here, shove your nose to the warped wood and watch you choke in your tainted, fetid air. but i will wait, opening windows to cleanse us, purify, till you notice i'm not your "little flower" anymore. so, father, why aren't you reading this? oh, "i understand", you were playing with your room mate again. you were leaving the phone off the hook. you were screening my calls on your answering machine, waiting for me to hang up, to go away, to drain from your thoughts. blood has its own sweet musk. blood makes you mine whether you want me or not.

Omnipotence

When I saw her laughing with her friends out on the ripe grass after lunch one day, I could sense her pain. It was there all along as she tossed her head in response to what they said. It was there in her eyes. I wanted to stop and tell her that I loved her dearly, but I didn't and instead just kept on walking. That night when the moon rose its weary head I could almost see the tears fleeing from the prisons that were her eyes and escaping only to be apprehended by the trembling fingers that belonged to her. She was gazing at the moon, as I was, and wondering out loud why its eyes glared at her so. She was unconscious to it, but I could hear her mother whispering of the peace that was falling right out from underneath their feet, and at the same time I couldn't see the small face that was stained from the redness of wanting what clearly could not be given to her. I wanted to pick up the phone and dial her number just so the ring would put an abrupt end to her grieving, but I couldn't and instead I laid on the floor staring at the bare wall above me. As she slept that night, I could feel the lumps in the pillow that she held so desperately close to her hoping with all of her strength that if she squeezed it hard enough perhaps she would wake from her never ending nightmare and maybe, just maybe, she would find her father's car in the garage again and know for the first time in a long time that her life was coming back into her grasp. I knew it wouldn't happen, and I wanted to tell her but deep down I knew that she knew. I knew of all these things and wanted to be there for her, but some mighty force of gravity or something had always held me back with its piercing claws of denial. Today is a new day, and the sun is shedding its skin of light down upon the glowing head that is hers. She is standing and laughing again with her friends, but this time I stop to tell her of the night my father left.

Hastings Beard (10)



K.C. BULL (11)

A Haiku

Whimsical Pleasures
Tousles her angelic hair
Sadness brings sweet peace.

Susan Clark (10)

Thewar

This picture is for Daddy. Not the paper doll Daddy who proudly gazes out from the pictures in a navy uniform more stiffly starched than the plane of photographer's paper that entraps him, but the true Daddy. She puts stout crayon to paper to make real the daddy she sometimes dreams about, the one she used to know, who smelled like soap and ocean salt and whose lap had all the right niches for her blonde head's sunset. A memory that flies like a dove around her unclouded four-year-old head lights on her mind, and she remembers the man who lifted her high into the clouds until she herself had bird's wings and swooped down to nest in his arms again. Daddy has her wings, now, though. He used them to fly off the place call Thewar, so his little girl with ice-white bows taming braids of flaxen yellow unmatched by any color in her box of crayons calls upon her youthful lip-licking, brow-knitting powers of concentration to draw a map of love that will surely bring him home.

Home would never be the same though, because Thewar was not just in one place. It seeped unheeded by immigration through the borders and into the population, like a chestnut blight on history. "Never forget!" came the cry of the victims, but those who live after can never forget. The earthquake of animosity which shook the world along religious and cultural fault lines toppled the tower of tradition that loomed over the early twentieth century. Women began to work outside the home, first in the U.S.O. and the hospitals, and then in the factories and shops and businesses. They kept the nation running, and found that they could run the nation. If only they could have recharted our course when they marked their takeover in the history books, they could have blotted out the hate that to this day lies just below the surface, like flotsam from a shipwreck, waiting for time and stormy seas to bring it to the surface before it began. Yet, that grimace of tribulation, which brands those who fought the war, like a concentration camp number never completely disappeared. It was handed down like Hitler's treasured blue eyes and blonde hair to the little girl who would one day trade her pristine dress for a uniform like her father's. Her mama had once explained that geese fly south for the winter, but return home in spring.

She wished her Daddy was one of those birds.

A Chocolate Covered Coffee Bean

Staring at my smoking cup of Java
I looked at the cream and sugar concotion that had solidified on the side of my cup,
Thinking "My coffee doesn't taste like it usually does."

Frustrated, upon the verge of non-drinking, I set the cup aside

Knowing it wasn't the coffee's fault, I was just having a bad day.

I tried to take in the conversation around me.

With a hodgepodge of sentence stew I swirled the ingredients together Laughing at the final ding-ding of the oven

That represented my brain.

I watched as older couples sipped their coffee With their yellow coffee-stained dentures, And their "no cream and no sugar" attitude. I wondered if I would be like them, Wanting life to be simple,

Wasting wishes in a coffee pot
Waiting for their cup to be filled with lukewarm Java,
Just so it wouldn't be empty.

I then looked at the college and "wanna-be" college crowd As they sip their cappuccinos with extra froth

and their de-caf lattes, Which to me

totally loses the importance of a coffee rush. They abandon their cup on the table,

Destroying the sugar snow-flakes that took so long to develop their individuality.

Leaving three-fourths of the cup as they leave,
They might as well have sipped it with a straw,
Or merely used it as a fan of peacock feathers
So they could personally display their sheep-bells
Letting non-freedom ring.

Thinking about getting back my coffee, I was suddenly interrupted by a friend.

With her hand out.

She offered me some chocolate covered coffee beans
That she snapped out of the jaws of the machine inside.
Thinking I had found a new hidden treasure

I put one in my mouth
Hoping to savor life.

But then I thought about the old people that I had seen.

They'd be laughing at me
Wondering if the generation gap had erupted without them knowing it.

And the college crowd, sitting on an earthquake,

Would laugh with me... Cheering me on.

Not wanting the best of both worlds,

I swallowed, hoping that this bean wasn't one from Jack and the Beanstalk. She then asked me if I wanted another one.

"No thanks," I said.
"I'll just stick to my cup of coffee."

Cold

Summer is fading. *
She can tell by the chill in the air.
She'd reluctantly spent
the warm months with him.
Now he helps her zip up her bags,
so she can go.

She wants him to hear what she isn't saying. Maybe that would get to him when everything else didn't, but he didn't get it at all. She thought he had a heart that might understand, but he'd lost that long before she was ever around.

Should she have held back?
Because she couldn't,
not after this long.
He'd already made his excuses,
but they all said, "I'm abandoning
you."
Her father isn't suppose to say that,
still she takes the responsibility,
his along with hers.

She walks away
the cold wind blowing back
the hot tears falling from her face
to hit his back
walking away from hers.
She had just fallen
from his grasp
like the early autumn leaves
crunching beneath his feet,
and he didn't care.

*Line from Phillip Larkin's poem

Rachel Allen (12)



KAT WARD (12)

Hope

A paragon of beauty.
A glimpse of perfect love.
A flower in the garden
of the shining sky above.
The absence of all hatred,
The presence of all good.
An abudance of the positive.
Not should or would, but could.
Maria Gumina (10)



RACHEL ALLEN (12)

eight and eight

brother fainted often. fell into puddles of body's salted water, and stopped. everything ceased with brother. sister remembers the times he'd quietly sit and most unexpectedly crawl inside to his ceasing place. he'd grip his left breast. sister would grip his grip and the beating would transfer over to her grip. the gripping moments were the closest moments.

gripping happened more often then not while sitting, relaxing, playing nothing games with fingers and toes and nipples and elbows. reason for sudden breath loss and fainting weren't exposed to either of them. the stillest of moments became stiller even by those damned indecisive moments of pausing. brother's life paused for second, that lasted for loner than jut seconds, about every two months.

"dear god!" he has this hole in his heart. and so many veins hang form the thick muscle and just retire into the crannies of his insides. sister patched up the existence of the hole in her mind, she didn't understand why the hole took her brother away. but brother was thick and strong like father.

he was downtown for week, taking longer than had been expected. it was eight and eight for those weeks. eight hours in operation and eight hours out, for resting time. and during the eight and eight time sister couldn't see him or touch him. she wanted his touch, his grasp.

all of those veins were driving blood into places where blood shouldn't exist, where blood shouldn't live. all of those veins pumped terror into sister. another year of ceasing and hand grippings and brother's life would have bleached away. fear was shoved into sister's mouth. she was forced to try it on, to taste it. she was forced to swallow it down.

My New Roof

Atop the roof of my freshmen dorm, I sit and think of you, sitting in your room at our home. Beneath your conforter you hide the phone while you talk until 3am., using a hushed voice so Mom won't wake up. Call waiting clicks in, it's an old friend of mine calling for my new number.

"Don't call her tonight," you warn, "she'll be at a party, in the library, or running with her roommate."

Evening has turned into night since I've been sitting on this slate roof thinking of you back home. For four years these stone walls will be my home, the soccer fields and quadrangles my back yard. "Grown up" is how I'm supposed to feel; yet, for the first time since I put on high heels as a six-year-old and vowed that I wanted to be an adult, I wish to be a little girl again. Hopscotch and not homework took up our time, we were each other's only friends. I directed and starred in the plays we put on; you were my supporting actress and never complained. Jogging through the park, you panted and wailed when I told you we had twenty minutes left on the afternoon run that I'd dragged you on.

"...Kill you," you said gasping for air, "I'm going to kill you for this." Laughing, I'd race you back to the car and smiled as I watched you pull yourself up the hill to meet me. "Mom wants us to go to the store," you told me as I started up the engine. Never tiring of loud music, you cranked the volume up and sang along to the Green Day song that you knew I hated. Opening the window, you stuck your head out to sing your song to the sky; I told you to be careful, you just laughed. Parking was limited at Kroger that cold October day during my Senior year; so, I left you and my car in the fire lane, and went in alone. Quickly I returned, as not to get a ticket, and found you intently scribbling in your poetry journal.

"Read it to me when your done?" I asked, knowing that you were planning to anyway.

Sitting atop my roof tonight, I think back to that poem, written almost one year ago. "Toddlers" was the title of the piece; it was about you and me growing up too slowly, and too quickly. Underneath my pillow the night before I left for college, I found a copy; your documentary of our childhood and your way of telling me that you'd remember. Violin lessons that mom made us take; each one of us practicing so that we could play the instrument, and not the margarine box and ruler concoction that we learned on. Washing dishes, as I pretended to be the mother and you pretended to be my child, after our parents had left the kitchen to watch TV. Xylophones, drum sets, and plastic guitars piled up in the basement that we used to play in, as we pretended to be a rock band. Yearbooks from the early years of our education, back when we still went to the same school, me the proud second grader, you the giggly and nervous kindergartner. Zoo visits, trips to Disneyland, summers at the beach, and holidays at relatives houses; all discussed and noted by your pen, the final stanza outlining the final trip we would make together as kids, the trip that would take me to my new roof; the one that I sit upon tonight and think of you.

Badlands of South Dakota

The wind. I stand there with my arms outstretched, fingers spread. eyes closed, my spine arching backwards with the weight of the rush. It whips about my whole body, dancing between my fingers, slipping through my legs, pitching a chill onto my skin, covering my entire length in unrecognizable glitter. It hurts. The burning in my face draws my hands to it, shielding my cheeks from the stinging as a mother protects her child. My features contract with the pressure as they do when startled by a bright sun — evebrows pushed together, lips pursed, nose wrinkled. My hair runs wild just as my shirt billows out from under me, leaping from my skin, pulling to be free. It throws me sideways, and I am pushed aside with no care than a fleeting thought. I sink to the ground, drawn by the childhood belief that if I keep moving down, I can go low enough to get under the wind. It will fly right over my head. The vast openness which surrounds me has a certain stillness to its look. It is deceiving. The wind blows so quickly that the limp, sea grass remains bowing to the ground; unmoving; lifeless. The sun has been replaced by thick gray and white clouds that chase themselves wildly, running into one and becoming another. A dull white light creeps from beneath them, getting lost somewhere between sky and earth. The mountains are little more than mud and clay, hardened with time, vet the ground is weak and it crumbles at the slightest of touches, disappearing through my hands like hot cake through a fork, and molding my footprints into its surface. Atop the hill, balanced on a slippery, narrow ledge, the brilliant pink and orange of the descending sun blend gracefully with the red and brown of the earth and the pastel of the grass. Everything is peaceful. Quiet. The only sound a faint breeze born of the violent wind, everything seems to hold itself in soundless anticipation of the evening. The gentle fiery glow of the sun makes everything immaculate for a brief moment before nightfall, and as quickly as I understand this, it all disappears, stolen by the thief of pitch black darkness.

Emy Noel (11)

Life

The smell of the earth the rain finds its innocence

a new world is born.

Rachel Wieck (9)



KELLY JACKSON (11)

The Father

Mother said, "dinner time," but he never came. Always an empty seat at our table, without him it wasn't the same. He wasn't there for me, but he didn't understand. I never told a single soul how much I admired that man. He would arrive and take a seat, as I was taking my last bite. Then he cracked a joke or two, and everything would be alright. I smiled my golden smile at him to mask all of my pain. Then I ran up to my room and all my tears fell like rain. Night after night, just as before he was always late. Year after year, as I began to grow, I built a wall of hate. I never told him how I felt, or how much he meant to me. I regret keeping feelings to myself. He died recently. I wish I could have told him, just so he would have known. Now all of the memories like scattered leaves have blown. I longed for his passion, just his single touch. I think it's because I hated him, why I loved him so much.

Underneath the Icing

The sun was setting and its orange glow made it seem dark in the small department store cafe, despite the strong electric light fixtures in the ceiling. There were only a few people there, so the place seemed lonely - deceptively so, if one looked out the open door at the swarms of people bustling and looking for a good buy. But in the corner of this little cafe there sat an old woman crying bitterly and unrestrainedly. She was wearing stylish, obviously expensive clothes and makeup, conspicuously accented by a profusion of jewelry. A younger woman, more quietly dressed, was sitting in the other chair and vainly attempting to comfort her. There were two pieces of cake, nearly untouched, lying on plates in front of them, as well as two cups of coffee, rapidly becoming pools of lukewarm acridity.

"I can't take it anymore, Liddy," was what the old woman was saying, although her words were so distorted by her hysterical sobs that they were nearly indistinguishable. "Afterwards I always think, 'Well, now it's over, now I'll be fine,' but then the next day it always starts all over again, and I can't bear it, I can't stand it, I-" Her voice dissolved

into tears.

"Please don't, Mother," pleaded the younger woman. "It makes me so unhappy

when you go on like that!"

"You! You unhappy!" The crying woman's temper flared up but then subsided. "I know - I know, but my life is disintegrating and it keeps getting worse, and I can't do a thing..." Suddenly, viciously, she stabbed her cake with her fork. A large piece broke off and was crushed by the swift motion of her hand.

"It will be all right in the end, Mother..."

"No, it won't. That would be the kind of amazing success story you see advertising self-help books - 'After going through Dr. X's revolutionary self-motivation program, Mary B. was able to make her life so good that...' that kind of thing. For every success story, how many failures are there? Can you tell me, Liddy? How many?"

Liddy shook her head in silence, and her mother, now over her hysterical outburst,

continued.

"Your life is like a wedding cake, Liddy - a beautiful wedding cake. It's perfect, as perfect, anyway, as possible...I'm glad, I want you to be happy."

She managed a faint smile, which faltered and then died, like when someone tried

to light a wet candlewick.

"I'm sorry I made such a scene. People told me already when I was a little girl, 'You're too old to throw a temper tantrum like that,' but I don't even think they would blame me now. No, they probably would. Nobody understands, really. Not even you, Liddy, although you think you do. Deep down, there is a thought inside you, 'How can she get hysterical like that? Doesn't she have any consideration?"

Liddy was beginning to become afraid. Her mother was too quiet, too composed.

It didn't seem natural.

"Eat some of your cake, Mother," she said, trying to seem calm and cheerful,

though her voice gave her away. "It will make you feel better."

The old woman picked up her fork and began to eat the cake. It seemed difficult for her to swallow. After a silent minute, she looked straight at her daughter. Her eyes were very blue and very bright. She looked terribly old and tired, and Liddy suddenly felt a pity different from any she had felt before for her mother - a sharp, desperate, helpless pity. The old woman said,

"This cake isn't good, Liddy. The icing is fine, but the cake underneath isn't very good. But you can't blame whoever made it. It's hard to make good cake, Liddy. I

know. I have experience."



AMBER WORRELL (12)

car wrecks and sex

We sat there in the bed of your truck and you told me teenage tales of sex and car wrecks. I listened as words spilled from your liquored lips, and I wondered when it was that I had given up roller skates for people like you.

You never knew what I was thinking, but I suspected I knew your every thought. You were so easy; your actions were open roads you didn't know I knew by heart. So when you called and I said okay, and you picked me up, I knew that we'd never make it to dinner or the movie and that you'd say you were tired and just wanted to talk, then we'd drive up here in the park and you'd pull out a bottle or can and you'd "talk" to me and that was okay because I knew it was coming.

There is a consistency in you, like the rhythm of school house swing sets; and I know you'll always be there to push me. You'll push me and I'll move up and away, but I always make it back to your arms.

You tell people you're crazy and they believe you, but I've seen you in the bed of your truck on those Friday nights, like a baby without a bottle; and I hold you and kiss your crew cut hair and wonder how I got here.

Far away from home.

Autumn

Summer is fading with my tan.

I stop shaving every day.

You call less. I work more.

I think of our park walks,
our picnics and driving in
your car with the windows
down. School starts. Football
practice takes all your time.

I work on the fall play.
You come to see it.

You come to see it. You bring the leggy Senior with the short skirts and long hair.

After my solo, I look at you. You are nuzzling her neck. I feel stupid in my costume, off key in my song, and lonely on the small, quiet stage. You leave at the intermission.

You put a note in my locker.
"Good job, Sport" it reads.
"Sport" is what you call your Collie.
I go home, saying that I'm sick.
I crawl into bed, and try to sleep.

Outside the leaves are falling.
I hear them hit angrily against
my window pane.
I hear the twigs snap in the crisp air.

I pull the pillow over my ears.

The wind pulls the leaves from the trees.

They are anxious, Winter is coming.



SINCLAIR KELLY (11)

The stars twinkle brightly, laughing at the moon that shines down upon the wilderness. The only sound is the soft swishing of the river bubbling over rock and earth, rushing for the sea. A stifled giggle rings through the clear night, and someone sighs at the perfect beauty of the night sky. "It's like staring into Heaven" they whisper. Again silence falls, and the stars resume their soft chatter with the moon.

Sarah Allen (9)

A Double Response to King Lear and Walt Whitman Exam Week 1996, In Lieu of Studying

Here I am, foolish and fond though no old man.

I remain, for I am bound by my promises to you and others;
I am kept by my word out of the cool air.

My impossible vow is to live away from the sunset, out of the night and stars. I will not be held forever—I am the irrepressible;
I am the herbicide - resistant dandelion left poking through the sidewalk
Though they assume that I fear their fiery wheel of torture.
I know how to scream and shout and beat walls down I am not ready to suffer for their amusement.
You may find that for some time you wish to remain here I will neither run from you nor snatch back what I give;
I am unable to teach perserverance, but I watch as you learn.
And should you decide at last that I am deserving of permanence,
I will love you for as long as you deign to stay, but you must know
I am the lover you never will find it easy to leave.

Elizabeth McClellan (11)

Photograph

A photograph, your face is in my mind, able to be called forth at any moment from the album of my memories.

Ready to be looked upon and memorized again, as if I didn't already know every line and curve and contour, like a mother knows her child.

But more than a photograph, brought to life by the erupting of a smile, the sudden casting of a look, indecipherable to all but me.

And better than a photograph, ever will your face be there, never to be disrupted or damaged, torn or faded, but remaining, like your love upon my heart, simply forever.

I walk ever so slightly down the damp streets, with only my shadow as my companion.

The lights, from above, beam down at me, like swords piercing my blue flesh.

The air, brutally cold, freezing my breath in sight, chaps my velvet cheeks.

My tattered old shoes scrape against the sidewalk, as I move towards the darkness.

My hands, stiff from the cold, are grasping the very last memory I have of you.

And like the sea, that churns in the rage of a storm, you are swept away from me in the silent night.

Amanda Brown (10)



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